

## Fr. Jack Spicer, C.Ss.R. (1919—2014)

*By Fr. Mark Miller, C.Ss.R.*

On Wednesday, Feb. 5th, the Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated for Fr. Jack Spicer by Archbishop Richard Smith, accompanied by Archbishops Joseph MacNeil and Gerry Pettipas, C.Ss.R., over twenty priests, and a congregation of relatives and friends. The homily by Fr. Ed Kennedy was a wonderful eulogy for a gentle, creative, pastoral, and dedicated priest. I will try to capture some of the homily as a tribute to Fr. Jack.

He was born in Edmonton but moved with his family to, and grew up in, Grande Prairie where his father opened a bakery. There Jack met the Redemptorists who arrived in the early 1930s. Jack was an athlete, good at running and hockey. He joined the Redemptorists, did his novitiate in Saint John, NB and spent five years in the seminary at Woodstock, ON. When he headed east, he had a full head of hair. When his mother saw him at his ordination in 1943, he was completely bald and her comment was, "What have you done to my son?"

After ordination and a one-year stint on the outmissions of Grande Prairie, Fr. Jack studied Polish at the Polish National Seminary in Orchard Lake, Michigan for a year and a half, returning to the West to work in parishes in Athabasca and Calgary, followed by Yorkton, where he began to develop a life-long love for the Scriptures along with study groups within the parishes. In Yorkton he built two elementary schools to go with the two Catholic high schools. And when he became pastor at St. Alphonsus in Edmonton, followed by St. Mary's, Saskatoon, he built both rectories—learning in Saskatoon from his mistakes in Edmonton (eg, the narrow windows). Wherever he went he established study groups in people's homes, to learn about the Word of God in the Scriptures and, at the time of the Second Vatican Council, the Council documents.

He was supported by a small, but dedicated staff such as Audrey Brackman and Sr. Madeline. Audrey typed many a hand-written manuscript and then used the Gestetner machine to reproduce the study booklets. Fr. Jack was instrumental at St. Al's with the implementation of congregational singing ("...whose people he encouraged to sing," said Fr. Kennedy, "if only to drown out Fr. Jack, whose voice was not the best!") and the formation of a choir that used Gregorian chant.

He was also famous for establishing the St. Patrick's Day celebrations at St. Al's—and the students at Holy Redeemer College also picked up this tradition—with music, dance, and all things Irish.

In 1968, he began a career of over thirty years as Director of the Adult Learning Commission in the Archdiocese of Edmonton. He formed many small groups to study the Scriptures ('basic Christian communities') and himself wrote the study texts on the Gospels in understandable language. He established the annual Scripture Fest which brought in renowned scholars such as Raymond Brown—many of whom came with the promise that Fr. Jack would personally tour them through the Canadian Rockies afterwards. Fr. Jack was also a pioneer in the use of videos as well as the local cable TV station through which he, at one time, spoke to about 95 small study groups, inviting phone-in questions after his talk.



**Fr. Jack Spicer, C.Ss.R.**

**Born: August 24, 1919**

**Ordained: June 20, 1943**

**Died: January 31, 2014**

The personal testimonies at the Wake also brought out the human side of Fr. Jack. He was a consummate pastor, who spent much time with his people, got to know their names, was a father-figure to many of the children in the parish, and a builder of community through the bazaars, St. Patrick's Day festivities, sports, and camping trips. One particular endeavor deserves special mention—his founding and support for a group he called "The Monicas," composed of women who were divorced or separated and raising their children mostly on their own. He brought these women together for support and would run summer camps, helped by his confreres, for the children in an era that was very hard on women in these circumstances.

In his latter years, Fr. Jack slowly lost ground to Alzheimer's. But he remained always genial and cheerful, with a ready smile. His great love and attention to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John gave him the utter conviction that 'if God was for us, who could be against us.' He knew that there was a place prepared for him and all of us from all eternity. I am sure that Our Mother of Perpetual Help was there to answer his request, "Pray for us now and at the hour of our death." Amen.

The Western Catholic Reporter printed an article and an editorial about Fr. Jack in the February 17th Edition as he had written a weekly column on the Sunday readings for 20 years. The article can be found on their [website](#) and the editorial can be found [here](#).



*Fr. Jack Spicer (far right) at his ordination June 20, 1943 with Fr. Stanley Goetz and Fr. William James*

*Photo courtesy of the Archives*



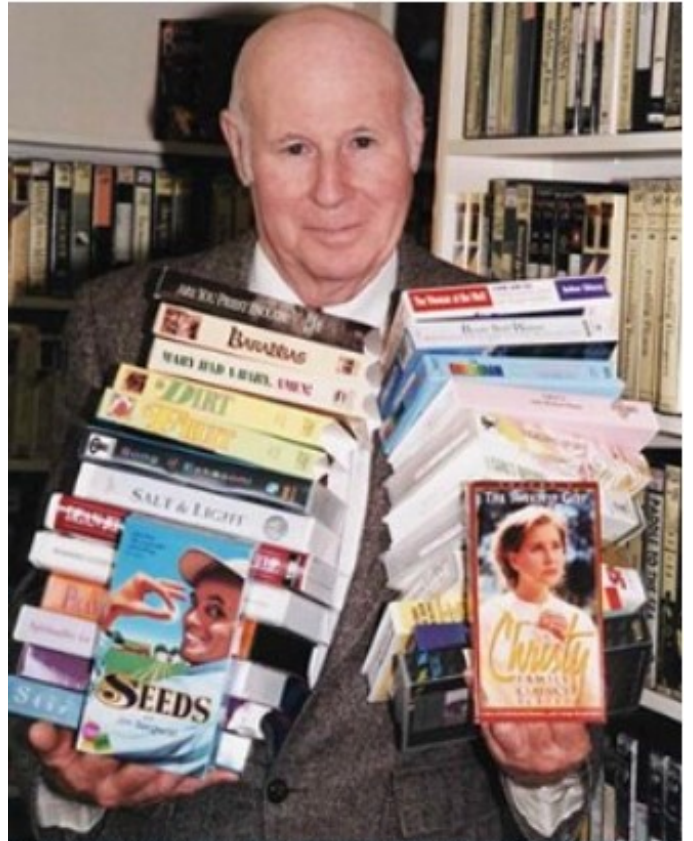
*Fr. Jack's Graduation from  
St. Mary's College, Brockville  
1937*

*Photo courtesy of the  
Archives*



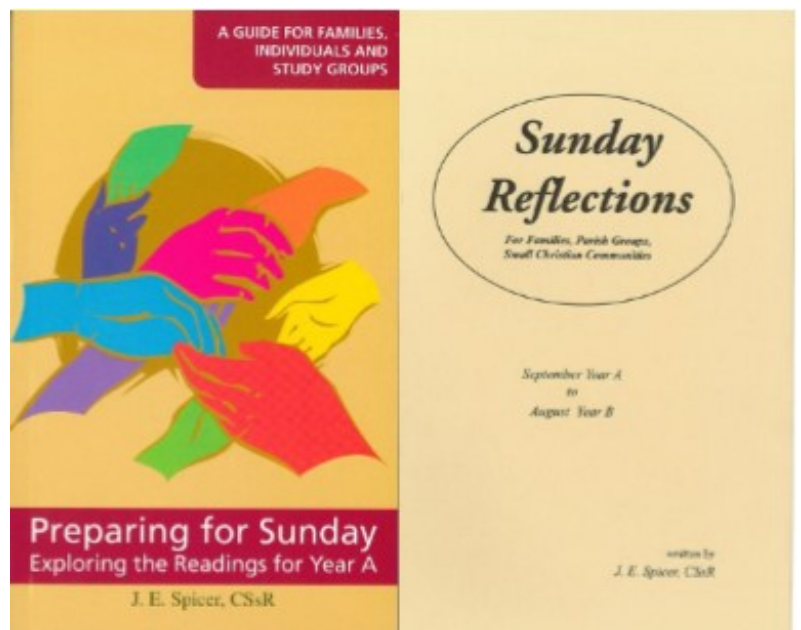
*Fr. Jack performing during the Irish  
concert in Saskatoon*

*Photo courtesy of the Archives*



*Fr. Jack with an armful of the videos available to the faithful from the Adult Learning Commission's library*

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*The covers of 2 of the more than 40 books written by Fr. Jack*